



**Christian Reflection**  
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Study Guides for

## Attentive Patience

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore the virtue of patience, its central role in our discipleship, and why its practice is difficult for us today. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

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## Christian Reflection

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### Focus Article:

📖 **Hurry and the Willingness to Be Creatures**  
*(Attentive Patience, pp. 11-18)*

### Suggested Article:

📖 **Where Does the Time God?**  
*(Attentive Patience, pp. 84-88)*

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# Hurry and the Willingness to Be Creatures

Our hurry reveals our anxiety about time. Yet the days that unfold are not a scarce resource slipping away, although they certainly are finite. Our time is God's terrible, mysterious patience, in which we meet what is beyond us and come to know ourselves as beloved creatures.

### Responsive Prayer

Almighty God, we confess we are unwilling—and often, unable—to see the rewards for waiting. We see the dividends of activity. We say, “Time is money.” We find our worth in activity, full calendars, and back-to-back meetings.

We hear the words of the Psalmist:

**Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.**

But we do not wait. Sometimes it is too hard.

**Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.**

Sometimes it is too boring.

**Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.**

Sometimes, we tell ourselves, we simply do not have enough time.

**Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.**

Help us *be still* and *wait* before you. **Amen.**

### Scripture Reading: Luke 2:21-38

### Reflection

Our hurriedness does not move us more quickly toward our goals, but distracts us from painful realities. And it reveals anxiety about time—“fear of losing it, shame about wasting it, ambition to produce more in it than the competitors do, or a struggle just to keep up,” Kelly Johnson notes. “The moral problem of a hurried culture is not its love of speed, but its collective evasion of the truth about ourselves and our world: we are creatures, living in an unfolding time whose purposes we do not create.”

Johnson traces two related evasions that hurried people come to cherish: about the nature of time and about their place in it.

- ▶ *Time has a purpose, but we mask it.* Scripture teaches that God has a purpose for events from the beginning to end of time, though it is mostly mysterious to us (see Ecclesiastes 3:11). In the modern era we have lost sight of this divine purpose (or distracted ourselves from it), and believe “Time is not for anything; it is only the blank page on which human beings write their stories.” Johnson explains, “The sense that time is a raw material to be filled with meaning by human productivity is not a fact, nor even an idea, but a social reality that has evolved through history.” The ways that we mark time—as “universally measurable, predictable, and exchangeable”—both reflects and helps to shape our social imagination.

No wonder we are anxious! We imagine time is “not the course of human life in relation to its Source and End, but an objective, scarce resource” required for our projects. But as this “essential



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and fragile commodity on which whatever we will make of our lives must be built" constantly slips away, we lose "the possibility of making our lives mean something." So, we desperately try to control the uncontrollable!

- ▶ *We have a place in time, but we avoid it.* "When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves," Romano Guardini has written. Thus, our modern purposeless view of time, when stretched by science to the scale of the universe, can leave us in a frightened horror that we are small and meaningless. "We are tempted to cope...by making all the meaning we can in the time we have," Johnson notes.

A Christian can see that the facts point another direction. The world has "intrinsic dignity" that is "grounded in a vastness that is beyond our knowing but is all beloved by God. The world is vast but not meaningless, beyond our knowing but not empty. The time that stretches behind and ahead of us is not ours to control, but it is neither a void nor chaos. It is the gift of God," says Johnson. "To live well in it, we have to begin to encounter both the wildness of creation and the tender intimacy of its Creator to it."

When we begin to think of time and our place in it rightly, we will realize that we are wayfarers "on the road, not at home," Johnson concludes. "We are not industrious entrepreneurs who are building our homes with limited opportunities and maximizing return on raw resources including time, rather we are travelers who are heading for a destination we do not altogether know, but following the road toward it in trust. The wayfarer has to live in the awkward, unrehearsed new encounter of each moment, always incomplete, never quite satisfying, because time is not a possession and not a home. It is the way to fulfillment."

### Study Questions

1. Why, according to Kelly Johnson, are we in such a hurry?
2. How did people in Western Europe begin to mark time differently in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries? What social arrangements pushed them toward this change, and what effect did the change, in turn, have on their relations to one another and the world?
3. Consider the vast time frame of the physical universe. How must this sheer size appear from the time-as-commodity perspective? How does it look from a perspective that sees time as filled with God's mysterious purpose? In each case, what responses does this fact draw from us?
4. According to Kelly Johnson, how are Simeon and Anna (in Luke 2:21-38) good examples for us concerning how to live as creatures before God in the uncertainty of time?
5. If the hurry in our lives is masking God from us, then we might think the best solution is to take a nice, relaxing vacation. Why is Kelly Johnson suspicious of this plan?

Departing Hymn: "To Know That You Are God"



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### Focus Article:

📖 Time for Patience  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 19-27)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Christ's Patience in the  
Garden  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 48-51)

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# Time for Patience

Christian patience keeps us on the path towards an ever more perfect love, especially when obstacles threaten to knock us off this path, or anger and distractions make us forget where we are going. Here patience gets a quite specific protective charge: it protects us against sorrow.

### Prayer

Almighty God, we forget that waiting is a season that shapes us.  
You, who came in the fullness of time,  
who knows the timelessness beyond time, wait,  
and we, in the image of God, must wait, too.

As we seek your kingdom  
within our homes, with one another,  
in the marketplace, the neighborhood, and the world,  
may we learn how to wait,  
how to be patient with stillness,  
how to keep your eternity just under the surface,  
knowing you wait *for* us and *with* us.  
Amen.

### Scripture Reading: Luke 22:39-45

### Reflection

Early Christian theologians highly valued the virtue of patience, which Gregory the Great calls "the root and safeguard of all the virtues." Growing in the virtues requires much time and attention, so patience is their *root*; and because anger, disappointment, and sorrow may weaken our embrace of God and neighbor, patience is the other virtues' *safeguard*. As Charles Pinches notes, "while patience does not of itself point us to our destination in God, unless we learn it, this destination can never be reached."

Pinches focuses on how patience can protect us from the distraction and disorientation caused by sorrow. We are properly sorrowful, and sometimes deeply so, when we encounter the sinful brokenness in ourselves and the world around us. Yet we know the dangers of such sorrow: we may become so absorbed in our sadness that we cannot see the good, or we may despair of ever doing the good. Thus, Augustine rightly warns that sorrow can produce an "unequal mind" that will "abandon the goods whereby [we] may advance to better things."

How can we feel sorrow (as we should) without succumbing to spiritual myopia and apathy? That is where Christian patience comes in. (It makes sense to call it "Christian" for two reasons: this patience is protecting not just any project we happen to have, but our following Christ; and it is bolstered by hope and trust in God. We will attend to the first point here, and return to the second point in the next study.)

Pinches points to Jesus' patience in Gethsemane as a model for us. "In the scene sorrow comes to Jesus, deep sorrow. This reminds us that the problem is not the sorrow itself, nor its depth," he explains. Jesus' patience is not passive, but active. "Jesus bears his sorrow, not only by praying fervently and weeping before God, but also by keeping his eyes fixed on the work that lies before him, and, at the right time,



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proceeding on to do it." Patience protects him from an "unequal mind." This is most clear in Mark's account, where Jesus commands the drowsy disciples, "The hour has come; ... Get up, let us be going!" (14:41b, 42a). "As for the disciples, the text does not mention that they are sorrowful in this scene – perhaps they are avoiding it as we often do – but their inordinate sleep, their failure to watch and pray, indicate that they have been knocked off course, and have acquiesced to the dark fog that surrounds them."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus illustrates the divine patience that we see through the long biblical narrative. Karl Barth expands this point: "The fact that [God] has time for us is what characterizes his whole activity toward us as an exercise in patience. Included in this exercise of patience is both God's mercy and punishment, God's salvation and destruction, God's healing and smiting... By it all Israel is instructed in the divine Word.... God always, and continually, has time for Israel."

Those early theologians understood that we need Christ-like patience that not only endures suffering, but clears our eyes to see deeply into reality. Such patience, Pinches concludes, guards us from being overwhelmed by our sorrow and enables us to notice others'. It protects love so it can grow and wait and act.

### Study Questions

1. Why is patience such an important virtue? How might we distinguish ordinary patience from Christian patience?
2. Discuss how Jesus' patience in the Garden of Gethsemane is active as well as passive. Why is this important?
3. According to Pinches, how does Lloyd LeBlanc show Christ-like patience in Sister Helen Prejean's memoir, *Dead Man Walking*? How does LeBlanc's patience reinforce Sr. Helen's?
4. What qualities of Jesus' patience are highlighted in the paintings by Matthias Stomer and Jacopo Marieschi that Heidi Hornik studies in "Christ's Patience in the Garden"?
5. In the departing hymn, "O Master, Let Me Walk with You," what elements of Christ's character do we pray to share? Why are these important for "walking" with him?

### Departing Hymn: "O Master, Let Me Walk with You" (vv. 1, 3, and 4)

O Master, let me walk with you  
in lowly paths of service true;  
tell me your secret, help me bear  
the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Teach me your patience; share with me  
a closer, dearer company,  
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong,  
in trust that triumphs over wrong.

In hope that sends a shining ray  
far down the future's broadening way,  
in peace that only you can give,  
with you, O Master, let me live.

*Washington Gladden* (1879), alt.

*Suggested Tunes: MARYTON or QUEBEC*



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### Focus Article:

📖 Practicing Hope through Patience  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 37-45)

### Suggested Article:

📖 The Patience of Job  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 46-47)

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# Practicing Hope through Patience

Hope helps us faithfully respond to suffering and makes patience possible. Not the limited versions of hope that serve to get us through our days, but the living theological virtue—the hope of Christ who was crucified and is risen now from the dead.

## Prayer

Scripture Reading: James 5:7-11

## Meditation†

Patience is not the indiscriminate acceptance of any sort of evil: ‘It is not the one who does not flee from evil who is patient but rather the one who does not let himself thereby be drawn into disordered sadness.’ To be patient means not to allow the serenity and discernment of one’s soul to be taken away. ... Patience is, as Hildegard of Bingen states, “the pillar that is weakened by nothing.”

Josef Pieper (1904-1997)

## Reflection

“Hope is practiced through the virtue of patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure,” Pope Benedict XVI writes in *Deus Caritas Est*, his encyclical on God’s love. A distinctive feature of Christian patience is its being grounded in hope and trust in God. And, as Benedict indicates, patience in turn enables us to act on this hope, even in dire circumstances.

Patience requires hope, Heather Hughes explains, because “we need to know how a story ends in order to keep going through the painful parts.” The alternative to such hope-practiced-through-patience is despair. Despair can appear as an enervating sadness: we fully recognize the brokenness in ourselves or the world, and cannot find the resources to continue to act. But it also manifests in restrained desires and welcomed distractions. The latter symptoms are common: “we do not expect too much, or look too hard at the world, or want more than that our human needs are met while we are alive,” she observes.

Hope is practiced through patience, but we are unpracticed and, so, not very good at being patient. “Patience for us has been pushed to the extreme edges of human experience,” Hughes admits. “We confront it only when forced; when unable to avoid the fact that we do not determine every aspect of our lives: pregnancy, tragedy, illness, injury, and death. Attempting to have patience at these times can feel intolerable—like torture—because we have not practiced under day-to-day circumstances. We are thrown into the deep end, completely untrained.”

How can we become more hopeful and patient? Hughes explores how we can be shaped in these important, related virtues through two experiences: suffering and prayer.

- ▶ *Suffering* often requires us to trust “in God’s plan even when it is painfully, seemingly aggressively, opaque to us,” she writes. These times can feel very lonely, but they would be unendurable if we were truly alone.” These times of suffering can stretch us spiritually. Augustine explains, “By delaying [his gift], God strengthens our desire; through desire he enlarges our soul and by expanding it he increases its capacity [for receiving him].”



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► *Prayer* is a school of hope and patience. “By prayerfully considering what we already know to be true—entering through prayer into the reality of our hope—we can gather the courage to be patient,” Hughes writes. “As an embodiment of our relationship with God, and thus our definition as his children, [prayer] comforts us” by reminding us we are never alone in our suffering. But prayer is more than informative; it is transformative “because it is an encounter with Christ himself. It is that encounter that brings hope, and hope changes our lives—gives us ‘final freedom from harm’ even in the midst of suffering.”

Hughes concludes, “The stretching of our hearts and our capacity for God is available to us not only in times of difficulty and suffering, but at every moment through prayer.” As our praying grows beyond mere reflection to “the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him’ . . . , [it becomes] a school for the practice of hope, and as members of a culture for whom patience is so alien, it is a school we must attend.”

### Study Questions

1. How does patience, in both its ordinary and Christian forms, depend upon hope?
2. What are the symptoms of despair in our culture? How can despair undermine our resolve and patient waiting to act?
3. According to Hughes, why is patience so difficult for us to practice today? How can we learn Christian patience?
4. Discuss the context in which James commends the patience of the prophets and Job (James 5:7-11). How is Job’s patience depicted in Georges de La Tour’s *Job Mocked by His Wife*?
5. In Georg Neumark’s hymn “If You But Trust in God to Guide You,” why is God trustworthy? How can this undergird our patience?

### Departing Hymn: “If You But Trust in God to Guide You” (vv. 1 and 2)

If you but trust in God to guide you  
and place your confidence in him,  
you’ll find him always there beside you  
to give you hope and strength within;  
for those who trust God’s changeless love  
build on the rock that will not move.

Only be still and wait his pleasure  
in cheerful hope with heart content.  
He fills your needs to fullest measure  
with what discerning love has sent;  
doubt not our inmost wants are known  
to him who chose us for his own.

*Georg Neumark* (1641), trans. *Catherine Winkworth* (1863), alt.  
*Tune*: WER NUR DEN LIEBEN GOTT (Neumark)

† Josef Pieper, *A Brief Reader on the Virtues of the Human Heart* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991), 20.



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### Focus Article:

📖 Hard Patience  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 67-75)

### Suggested Article:

📖 The Difficulty and Beauty  
of Patience  
(*Attentive Patience*,  
pp. 76-79)

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# Hard Patience

In one of his so-called “terrible sonnets,” Gerard Manley Hopkins confronts how very hard it is to ask for patience and to see the world from God’s perspective. Yet patience draws us ever closer to God and to his “delicious kindness.”

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:3-5

### Meditation

Patience, hard thing! the hard thing but to pray,  
But bid for, Patience is! Patience who asks  
Wants war, wants wounds; weary his time, his tasks;  
To do without, take tosses, and obey.

Rare patience roots in these, and, these away,  
Nowhere. Natural heart’s ivy Patience masks  
Our ruins of wrecked past purpose. There she basks  
Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day.

We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills  
To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills  
Of us we do bid God bend to him even so.

And where is he who more and more distils  
Delicious kindness? — He is patient. Patience fills  
His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know.

*Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)*

### Reflection

For many of us, the Apostle Paul’s encouragement to “glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience” (Romans 5:3, KJV) is difficult to understand and even harder to embrace. We know too many people who, when confronted with suffering, succumbed to sadness, anger, and despair.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins “experienced his share of tribulations near the end of his life” and struggled with the spiritual dangers they invited, Melinda Creech writes. Yet in a letter to his longtime friend Robert Bridges, Hopkins confirmed his Christian hope. He had gained a valuable insight, Creech notes: “When we are robbed of peace, the Lord leaves us patience instead, which ‘plumes to Peace thereafter.’”

Creech traces Hopkins’s mature understanding of the Christian virtue of patience in his sonnet, “Patience, hard thing!”

- ▶ It is *hard to ask God for patience*, Hopkins notes in the first quatrain. That is because the virtue is not teeth-gritting endurance, Creech explains, but coming “to see things from God’s perspective,” to experience the world’s brokenness expressed in such things as war, wounds, weariness, deprivation, and affliction, and yet to obey God’s leading.
- ▶ Yet, *patience is a treasure*, Hopkins affirms in the next quatrain. “He likens patience to ivy, with its purple berries and ‘seas of liquid leaves’ that slowly cover the imperfections in a wall, making it beautiful,” Creech writes. It is like the Kenilworth ivy he had admired on cliffs above Tremadoc, Wales. Known as “the plant of Madonna,” this ivy is associated with Mary, whom the poet esteemed for her patient obedience to God.



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- ▶ *Allowing God to transform our rebellious wills requires patience*, he notes in the next tercet. Clearly patience must be a gift, not a personal accomplishment. Repenting and asking God to deal with our sin is like the heart grating on itself.
- ▶ *The patience we seek is exemplified by God*. The poet likens God to a bee working unwearyingly over the ivy. "God converts patience with patience, a cooperation of his grace and our work, into 'delicious kindness,'" Creech explains. "In a way, this offering of the bee is Eucharistic: we drink the honey and eat the honeycomb; his sacrifice becomes our sustenance and our joy." The last line reminds us "that [patience] comes [a play on combs] those ways we know [through war, wounds, weariness, deprivation, afflictions, and obedience.]"

The patience which Hopkins sought he exhibited through hopeful commitment to his work and confidence that his poetry would be appreciated. "The key to his development of patience may have been his attentiveness," Creech suggests. "He was a careful observer of nature, and as evidenced in 'Patience, a hard thing!,' creation was his teacher. He also paid attention to the people who crossed his path, and some of them became teachers of patience for him. Finally, he learned from the Bible and spiritual writings how to cultivate attentive patience in his life."

### Study Questions

1. Why, according to Gerard Manley Hopkins, is seeking the virtue of patience so difficult? If it is so hard, why would a person pray to develop patience?
2. How is the virtue of Christian patience a participation in the divine patience?
3. Review how Hopkins was catechized in patience by his close attention to nature, his encounters (real and imagined) with other people, and spiritual writings. Can you identify similar teachers in your experience?
4. According to Carolyn Blevins, when we face intense personal suffering and grief, why is it so difficult to be patient with oneself, other people, and God?

### Departing Hymn: "Light after Darkness"

Light after darkness, gain after loss,  
strength after weakness, crown after cross;  
sweet after bitter, hope after fears,  
home after wandering, praise after tears.

Sheaves after sowing, sun after rain,  
sight after mystery, peace after pain;  
joy after sorrow, calm after blast,  
rest after weariness, sweet rest at last.

Near after distant, gleam after gloom,  
love after loneliness, life after tomb;  
after long agony, rapture of bliss,  
right was the pathway, leading to this.

*Frances R. Havergal (1879)*

*Suggested Tunes: LIGHT AFTER DARKNESS or ADELAIDE*



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### Focus Article:

- 📖 The Education of Attention  
(*Attentive Patience*, pp. 28-36)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Waiting to Eat  
(*Attentive Patience*, pp. 80-83)
- 📖 Toward a Slow-Enough Church  
(*Attentive Patience*, pp. 89-93)

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# The Education of Attention

If Simone Weil (1909-1943) is to be believed, we need more books. She shows how something as ordinary as school studies, undertaken in the proper spirit, can develop that specific form of attention which, when directed toward God, is the very substance of prayer.

## Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 5:15-16

Meditation: from Psalm 46:10a

Be still and know that I am God.  
Be still and know that I am.  
Be still and know.  
Be still.  
Be.

## Reflection

That we are living in (what Jeffrey Bullock calls) an “age of impatience” is nowhere clearer than in our attitudes toward knowing the truth about ourselves, the world, and God. We rate too quickly (and often too positively, but sometimes negatively) our own intentions and character, hastily categorize other people’s actions and motives, rush to judgment on how natural systems work, and cursorily evaluate programs and institutions. We suffer from a cultural attention deficit disorder that leaves us gorging on easy-to-digest info-nuggets and avoiding the substantial mystery in ourselves, our friends, the world, and even God.

We have “diseased habits” of inquiry, warns Brad Hadaway. To prune them away and replace them with habits of patient attention, he builds on Simone Weil’s insights in “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God.”

- ▶ *Receptivity, not strenuous activity, is the heart of attention.* Weil says, “attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object.” This openness, Hadaway explains, is “not a mere *willingness* to accept the truth, but an *anticipation* of it – a hungering for the truth and hopeful expectation of its arrival.” He compares apprehending truth to receiving a gift: “we wrestle with a thorny problem, try a number of failed strategies, and feel stymied by lack of progress, only to be *hit* with a new thought that leads to a solution. Weil generalizes from this mysterious experience of insight to all discovery of truth.”
- ▶ *We must prepare ourselves for this openness and receptivity.* We need background knowledge to make the moment of insight intelligible. Gathering and maintaining this backdrop of knowledge can be a “grinding, often-monotonous, and less intellectually challenging” preparation for attentive study.

Next, the act of attending itself requires (what Weil calls) “negative effort.” We must keep certain “particular and already formulated thoughts” of background knowledge in our minds, but hold them sufficiently at bay to be open to new insights about the object of our study.

Finally, we must “empty our souls” of prideful concerns to master objects, problems, and persons. Our failures to understand some-



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thing, Hadaway notes, often trace “to misplaced efforts to squeeze the problem or object before us into a preconceived solution or interpretation.”

- ▶ *The highest use of attention occurs in prayer*, which Weil calls “the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God.” Other studies prepare our hearts for prayer because the truths we seek participate in the Truth, which is God. “Many of us have waited for God, but without immediate results of a profound and deep awareness of God’s ineffable transcendence,” Hadaway admits. But “the more ways we find to practice attention with patience, the more we can trust that God will continue to take greater and greater possession of us. After all, it is God who is seeking us.”

“Study, then, is exactly the kind of spiritual practice that a restless and activity-infatuated people of God need,” Hadaway notes. But other daily activities—if they are truth-oriented, require patient attention, and are congruent with the ultimate goal of developing a capacity for prayer—can encourage the sort of patient attention we need in prayer. He mentions, for example, “reading serious novels and short stories,” “studying the Bible or books of Christian reflection in a church setting,” “practicing music, creating art, playing chess, pausing in worship to reflect quietly on a text or image,” and taking “quiet walks where the ‘text’ is the beautiful created order.”

“Rather than add to our already oppressive to-do lists, we need only to survey current practices to discover which ones, like school study, can help us cultivate the relevant form of attention,” Hadaway concludes. “The great work of prayer is to find *all* the ways to quiet our souls, practice attention, and wait patiently for the light to find us in our ‘wise passiveness.’”

### Study Questions

1. Describe the easy receptivity or openness that is essential to study which leads to insight, according to Simone Weil. Why does she think that willpower which “makes us set our teeth and endure suffering...has practically no place in study”?
2. What sorts of preparatory, “negative effort” can prepare us to have moments of insight in our studies?
3. What are the key similarities between certain forms of study and prayer that allow those studies to prepare our hearts for prayer, according to Weil? What is the distinctive difference in prayer, and why is it so important?
4. Which of your daily activities seem to encourage “diseased habits of restless distraction”? Which activities nurture the sort of patient attention required for prayer?
5. Consider, with Taylor Sandlin, how participating in the Lord’s Supper, or Communion, can foster attentive patience. What other worship practices can have this benefit, to some extent, as well?

Departing Hymn: “To Know That You Are God”

# Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

# Hurry and the Willingness to Be Creatures

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 4, and 5	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To examine how our hurriedness is masking us from the true nature of time and our place in it as God's creatures.
2. To discuss how time came to be reimagined as a scarce commodity.
3. To contrast two responses to the temporal vastness of the universe – from the perspectives of time-as-commodity and of time-filled-with-divine-purpose.
4. To review some spiritual practices that can help us break through to the true purpose of time.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Attentive Patience (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Story

In a now-famous interview on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, comedian Louis C.K. exclaims "Everything's amazing right now, but nobody's happy!" It's hilarious commentary on our hurried lives, Kelly Johnson notes. "He recounts hearing a man whine when, on a plane traveling through the air at six hundred miles per hour, the high-speed Wi-Fi connection broke down. To people frustrated with their cell phone's surfing speed, he cries: 'Give it a second! It's going to space! It's all unbelievably fast, but it is still not fast enough for us.'"

Johnson continues, "And although we are capable of greater speed than any generation of humans before, in the face of life-threatening crises, we drag our collective feet. We get instantaneous reports of major melting in Antarctica, but global talks to limit greenhouse gasses are stalled. Video coverage of brutality against black bodies goes viral in minutes, while the United States has never commissioned a study of the possibility of reparations for slavery. Companies that trade stocks in milliseconds still have not eliminated the gender wage gap, and our amazing cell phones include metals that may have been mined by slaves, though we thought we left slavery behind in the nineteenth century. How can we be hurrying so much and yet changing so slowly?" (*Attentive Patience*, p. 11)

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read responsively the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 2:21-38 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

We begin this series of studies on the virtue of patience by examining one of the chief obstacles to developing and practicing patience today – the hurriedness that dominates our lives. What purpose does our hurry serve? It does not move us more quickly to our important goals or make more time available for relationships. Kelly Johnson suggests hurriedness has become an addictive drug that distracts us from realities we'd like to avoid – the real purpose of time, and our place in it. Hurry distracts us from our creatureliness before God.

Members who want to explore other dimensions of hurriedness in modern culture will find helpful resources in Roger Owens's review, "Where Does the Time God?"

### *Study Questions*

1. At times we are forced by circumstances and against our choice to hurry, but often we welcome a hurried lifestyle. "Being in a hurry inflames my sense of the importance of my agenda while it shrinks my attention to a narrow field," Kelly Johnson notes. This narrowing of attention is useful on an important task, but we begin to use it as a stratagem "to avoid painful realities." Johnson thinks hurriedness reveals our "anxiety about time: fear of losing it, shame about wasting it, ambition to produce more in it than the competitors do, or a struggle just to keep up." It's also an "evasion of the truth about ourselves and our world: we are creatures, living in an unfolding time whose purposes we do not create." These two things – the evasion of creatureliness and the anxiety about time – are related: we want to escape our high calling to relationship with God, but despair of making any alternate purpose on our own. "Christianity sees in this struggle the discomfort of a natural creature with a supernatural destiny, a beloved creature broken by sin, a redeemed creature not yet brought to fulfillment," she explains. "Evasion of that discomfort is not the solution."
2. Bells once marked the hours of prayer and reminded people of their relationships to God and to one another before God. The rise of another relationship – market labor – required bells to mark equal periods of time, in order to protect laborers' wages and employers' due. Increasingly people thought of time as a commodity to sell or buy. It had no inherent "worth" or meaning, except that supplied by the purposes of the employer or laborer.
3. Form two groups to consider, "What emotions should humans feel when they consider the vast time frame of the physical universe?" Read Ecclesiastes 3:11 to summarize the biblical view that time has a divine meaning, though it's mostly mysterious to us. Ask one group to respond from the perspective that time is a commodity with no inherent meaning, but it may be given meaning by our individual or communal projects. Ask the other group to answer from a perspective that sees time as filled with God's mysterious purposes. Explore the groups' answers. If they use the same emotion term – e.g., fear – do they mean the same response, with the same object, etc.? If they use different terms – e.g., horror vs. awe – what explains their choices?
4. In the brief vignettes of Simeon and Anna, we meet "people who lived with creaturely trust in the uncertainty of time," Johnson writes. Simeon, filled with the Spirit, trusted he would see the Messiah before he died. "If those days of waiting were frustrating, he did not resort to pretending that God had abandoned him, nor that the Messiah had already come, nor much less that he had to rush to make some meaning for himself before his time ran out. He did not make himself busy, hurrying to avoid his fears for Israel. He waited and watched," Johnson notes. Similarly, the prophet Anna waits patiently for God to redeem Israel. They "clearly understood that they were in a story not of their making. ... They trusted that the full story was in the hands of one who means us good, one way or another. And that trust meant that they were among the few who could act quickly, effectively, and wisely when the new moment demanded it. Their patient attention to the gift of time meant they neither hurried nor delayed, but recognized the gift of each moment already full of meaning."
5. That relaxing vacation sure sounds nice, but it might be just another version of the mask of hurriedness, Johnson warns. It might reinforce our pride, if we think that we deserve a costly, distracting break because "we are the kind of people who have to hurry, who are important, and who do not have time to be concerned with anything other than the very important matters we are racing to address." As an antidote to hurry, she recommends, instead, cultivating "practices of conversation and prayer that require stillness and patience, not to evade reality but to discover it."

### *Departing Hymn*

"To Know That You Are God" is on pp. 55-57 of *Attentive Patience*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Time for Patience

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To consider why the virtue of patience is so highly valued in Christian discipleship.
2. To study Jesus' patience in the Garden of Gethsemane as a model for our patience.
3. To examine examples of the portrayal of Christian patience in art, hymnody, and contemporary narrative.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Attentive Patience (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "O Master, Let Me Walk with You" locate one of the familiar tunes MARYTON or QUEBEC in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)) or Hymnary.org ([www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)).

## Begin with an Observation

We notice the value of patience when we think about those times we are tempted especially to become impatient. Charles Pinches writes, "Are you driving a car somewhere, perhaps late for an appointment? Trying to arrange a flight in the airport after your scheduled one has been cancelled? Moving through city streets with a group and someone is lagging?"

"Impatience very often arises when we have a plan, and are focused on carrying it through – something we are accustomed to doing in Western society where plans are expected and there is no shortage of instruments for effectively carrying them out. Yet this very fact about impatience can make it ironic, even comical. For impatience tricks us into taking unnecessary risks which can set us far behind wherever we were when we became impatient. Or it causes us to rant and rail furiously against whatever blocks our way. And so it derails us from the very track we wanted so impatiently to travel. Have you ever stood in an airport behind someone who is shouting at an attendant because his travel plans have been disrupted? He looks positively silly. Moreover, you know it will do him no good to vent at this airline representative, who appears to be listening serenely but quite possibly is becoming impatient herself. The traveler's fit of impatience is making it increasingly less likely that he will get where he wants to go." (*Attentive Patience*, p. 19)

Pinches calls this phenomenon the stupidity of impatience. It deflects us, as medieval thinkers would say, from "the good of reason." In this lesson Pinches focuses on how valuable patience is our discipleship as a way of staying the course, thinking straight, and not despairing when we face the brokenness in ourselves and the world.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 22:39-45 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

This study and the next, “Practicing Hope through Patience,” focus in turn on two reasons that a form of patience might be called “Christian”: it is ordered toward following Christ, and it depends on hope and trust in God. These features distinguish Christian patience from ordinary patience and teeth-gritting endurance. Christian patience is essential in our discipleship because it helps preserve our discernment about and commitment to God’s way when we encounter evil in ourselves and the world. Such patience is modeled by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

## Study Questions

1. Some capacity for *endurance*, of course, is useful to anyone who is trying to accomplish an important project, whether saintly or wicked. It helps one deal with various difficulties.  
*Ordinary patience*, as Charles Pinches defines it, adds an orientation toward what seems, all things considered, to be good. It helps one stay focused on the track that seems reasonable and not be distracted from the good by things like anger, boredom, or disappointment. It “involves waiting and knowing the right time” to act to achieve or protect the good end.  
He suggests that *Christian patience* “is distinguished by the end to which it is ordered,” namely “following Christ.” Later he adds that it “connects essentially to the theological virtue of hope which sustains life now while also anticipating another time” when God overcomes evil and restores his creation to its good order.
2. As he prays in the Garden, “Jesus, the ‘man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief’ (Isaiah 53:3, KJV), knows the world’s deepest sorrows and enters into them out of love,” Pinches writes. Yet “Jesus bears his sorrow, not only by praying fervently and weeping before God, but also by keeping his eyes fixed on the work that lies before him, and, at the right time, proceeding on to do it.” So, patience involves both passive waiting, but also active focus. “Like Jesus in the garden, the patient person acts often and decisively, although she also waits. She is whole in both her acting and waiting,” Pinches explains. “Such an integral life knows sorrow; it must, if it is truthful. But it also knows great joy. . . . Patience keeps us squarely in *this* time by resisting the forces by which sorrow obscures and overwhelms joy and stymies love. If we are patient we have the power to go forth even if our heart aches, as Jesus went forth in the garden to face his betrayer.”
3. Prejean calls Lloyd LeBlanc the hero of *Dead Man Walking*, the memoir of her ministry to and advocacy for men and women sentenced to death row. He’s the father of the young man brutally murdered by Patrick and Eddie Sonnier. Prejean learns “from Lloyd of a patience that goes deep enough to enable him to emerge whole from the horror of such senseless violence and death.” Lloyd prays regularly for his son’s soul, his wife’s recovery, and for Pat and Eddie Sonnier and their mother, Gladys. He supports Prejean’s ministry to Eddie and visits Gladys before her death to comfort her. Lloyd remains patiently focused on God’s good purposes, and this keeps him from being overwhelmed by sorrow.
4. Heidi Hornik writes that these paintings attributed to Matthias Stomer and Jacopo Marieschi highlight two qualities of Jesus’ patience: it “seeks to avoid suffering if possible, but endures it if necessary” and “rests on a sense of Providence, or of divine purpose.” The images depict Jesus’ anguish, but also his focus on God’s purposes, which are symbolized by the cup offered to him by an angel.
5. Washington Gladden’s, “O Master, Let Me Walk with You,” is a prayer that Christ will enable our faithful discipleship by teaching us his virtues. Each stanza focuses on a related virtue: endurance of hardships that one encounter in service to others, patience that trusts in God to triumph over wrong, and hope in God’s future that brings peace to our lives in the present. We see these virtues on display most vividly in Jesus’ prayer in the garden, but they are visible throughout his ministry. Encourage members to share experiences in their discipleship that have required this sort of endurance, patience, and hope.

## Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Practicing Hope through Patience

## Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To understand how Christian patience depends upon hope in God and enables us to act on that hope.
2. To consider how we can develop Christian hope and patience through the faithful endurance of suffering and through the practice of prayer.
3. To identify two symptoms of despair in our culture—enervating sadness and lowered expectations for our lives.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Attentive Patience (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “If You But Trust in God to Guide You” locate the tune WER NUR DEN LIEBEN GOTT (Neumark) in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)) or Hymnary.org ([www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)).

## Begin with a Story

“I went to my church to pray, but became upset instead of comforted,” Heather Hughes recalls about a difficult time in her life. “I began complaining to God: *Why won’t you make this easier? And if you won’t stop bad things from happening, why don’t you at least supply me with peace when they do? Can’t you, one way or another, take this away from me?* It was perhaps my Gethsemane-like phrasing that made me look up from where I had been staring down at the pew in front of me. Then I almost started laughing.

“I have rarely felt so explicitly answered by God, seeing Christ on the cross over the altar in my church. Words could not have been clearer: *You know that is not how I work. There is no escaping the cross – even for me there was not.* I had my answer, and it was the crucifix. God does not suddenly erase suffering, or how would good would come of it? The only way to end suffering is to go through it with God, because there is no way around.

“That may sound discouraging but, I assure you, in the moment it was not. My encounter with the crucifix gave me the key to having patience when I was totally exhausted and that felt impossible: it gave me hope—an assurance in the midst of pain that, no matter how bad my life got, I knew how the story ended. I wanted to hear that my pain would be over now, but I needed to hear both that it would end eventually and that it did not have to be meaningless.” (*Attentive Patience*, pp. 37-38)

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to bless members with hope and patience to respond to the specific sufferings they face, whether these were shared or unexpressed.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read James 5:7-11 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

The previous study, "Time for Patience," and this one focus in turn on two reasons that a form of patience might be called "Christian": it is ordered toward following Christ, and it depends on hope and trust in God. These features distinguish Christian patience from ordinary patience and teeth-gritting endurance.

Christian patience is the virtue that enables us to act on our hope in the midst of disappointment and suffering, and thus Heather Hughes speaks of "practicing hope through patience."

## Study Questions

1. Being patient in disappointment and suffering does not mean that we passively accept our troubles, but that we actively stay focused on our good purpose. This requires hope that all is not lost; we must expect the good purpose ultimately will be accomplished, and usually not just by our own efforts, but with the caring assistance of others. So, even ordinary patience requires some hope for a good future and friends' help. Christian patience is distinguished by its aim at following Christ into God's future and its trust in God's assistance.

Heather Hughes contrasts true patience to these "half-truths and alternatives: the anesthetizing unreality of false hope, the sibilant 'patience' muttered by ambitious cartoon villains which waits only for tangible reward, the hopeless placidity of despair, and the cold endurance of stoics, or nihilists, who can seem powerful in their immovability and heroic by persisting for absolutely no reason."

2. Hughes gives an extended example of despair in contemporary dating culture, in which despair manifests not as enervating sadness, but as settling for what's easily available: you "take what you can get when you can get it and not look too hard at what you want or why you want it — not search out a *telos* for your desires that may not be there." She continues, "In much of modern life, the virtue of patience has been reduced to the patience of the predator (working and waiting for the most beneficial moment to take by force what is desired) and the patience of the junkie (working and waiting for relief by temporary oblivion). Even if not everyone acts on these assumptions, it is a part of the cultural air we breathe."
3. We rarely practice patience in day-to-day situations. "Patience is almost never required of us," Hughes notes. "When there is even a threat that we may be required to wait for something, we have gotten used to having screens shoved in our faces: at the grocery store, in waiting rooms, even while having our teeth cleaned at the dentist." When patience is required in grievous situations, "We are thrown into the deep end, completely untrained."

Growth in Christian hope and patience requires "stretching of our hearts and our capacity for God." That is, we must desire God's good future more fully and be more confident in God's assistance. The Apostle Paul was stretched in this way through suffering as he came to rely more fully on God. We are also stretched this way through the practice of prayer.

4. James commends patience in the context of suffering, perhaps when one has been treated unjustly by rich and powerful people (cf. James 5:1-6). Job's reputation for patience is based on this scripture passage and its stimulus for Gregory the Great's influential reading of the book of Job in the sixth century. La Tour depicts the moment when Job resists his wife's taunting encouragement to end his life. In the biblical story, Job rebukes his wife and expresses trust in God (Job 2:9). In this painting, their conversation is intimate and Job expresses his resistance to despair through an anguished but determined stare.
5. Neumark wrote this, his most famous hymn, on the occasion of finally finding employment after he had been robbed almost penniless on his journey to enroll in university. (The full story is at [www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org).) The first stanza reminds us that God's love is unchanging, which is a source of hope and strength to those who trust God. The second stanza emphasizes God's intimate knowledge of our needs and commitment to meeting them with "discerning love." Divine love is emphasized again when it says God "chose us for his own." God's attention to and love for us is a source of joy and confidence in our times of trouble.

## Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Hard Patience

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To explore how Gerard Manley Hopkins depicts the difficulty and beauty of Christian patience in “Patience, hard thing!”
2. To examine how personal suffering can be an opportunity to develop and exhibit patience.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Attentive Patience (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Light after Darkness” locate one of the tunes LIGHT AFTER DARKNESS or ADELAIDE in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)) or Hymnary.org ([www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org)).

## Begin with a Story

Though Gerard Manley Hopkins, S. J. (1844-1889), is now recognized as one of the greatest English poets of his time, his distinctive style—he called it “sprung rhythm”—was not embraced by his contemporaries and his poems were not published during his lifetime. The final six years of his life were especially isolated and difficult. He suffered chronic pain (possibly from Crohn’s disease), and served in a lonely, drudging assignment as professor at University College and the Royal University of Ireland in Dublin. In a poem titled “To seem the stranger” he complained, “I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third Remove.” As Melinda Creech explains, “He was removed from his family, removed from the land he loved, and even within his Catholic faith he was ostracized because he was not ‘born Catholic’ or Irish.”

Hopkins’s depression is evident in six poems from this period, the so-called “terrible sonnets” or “sonnets of desolation,” which were discovered after his death. One of these, “Patience, hard thing!,” reveals the poet turning a spiritual corner. Creech commends it for Hopkins’s insight into the relation between personal suffering and developing the virtue of patience.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God, even in the midst of our difficulty and suffering, to draw us closer to him and to one another through attentive patience and hope.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Romans 5:3-5 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Before the meeting, ask a group member to prepare to read aloud “Patience, hard thing!” with understanding.

## Reflection

This study explores the difficulty in seeking Christian patience and the great beauty of this virtue in the context of personal suffering and grief. Consider how much biographical background members will need to appreciate

Gerard Manley Hopkins's sonnet. Use Carolyn Blevin's article to focus on the dimensions of patience with oneself, others, and God.

### Study Questions

1. Hopkins realizes that to have the virtue of patience is "to see things from God's perspective" – which is to say, to face and understand the world's brokenness, eschew false hopes, and not fall into patterns of avoidance. "It is a hard thing to ask for patience," Melinda Creech explains, "because [Hopkins] knows from experience that such asking is praying for war, wounds, weariness, deprivation, affliction, and obedience." Obedience to God's way is the hardest aspect of patience. In Hopkins's own life, having patience meant seeking and embracing God's perspective on his ambitions as a poet, work as a professor, and commitment to the ministry of the Jesuits.

The beauty of patience, according to Hopkins, is twofold. First, "Patience masks / Our ruins of wrecked past purpose"; perhaps by this elusive phrase he means the new perspective *replaces* our rebellious goals with a divine purpose, or that it *reveals* God's gracious dealing with those goals. Also, patience brings us closer to God, for "He is patient."

2. We *benefit from* the divine patience; our salvation is due to God dealing patiently with us. Thus, Creech suggests the final tercet is a Eucharistic image: the honey, the "delicious kindness" distilled by the divine patience, is presented to us as "our sustenance and joy." Also, our patience *comes to imitate* the divine patience; our "times" and "tasks" become sacrificial efforts on behalf of those around us, as our wills are bent to God's will. This last point is important. Christian patience is not abusive subservience to other people's whims; rather, it involves discernment about and alignment with the divine purpose for our lives.
3. Form three groups to explore how Hopkins learned patience from three sources: his close attention to nature, his encounters (real or imagined) with other patient people, and his study of certain spiritual writings. (Regarding the first, notice how Hopkins learns patience by his attending closely to natural systems to appreciate their intricate beauty, and by noticing certain slow workings of those systems.) Invite each group to share how they have learned patience from these sources. Ask members if there are other ways that they have been catechized in patience.
4. When Carolyn Blevins suffered many heavy losses at once—her mother-in-law's passing, her mother's medical emergency, and her thirty-two-year-old daughter's murder—she began to learn much about patience. Form three small groups to report on why Blevins struggled to be patient *with herself* (for example, she found it hard to like herself after the changes caused by suffering; it was hard to practice forgiveness toward the murderer), *with others* (e.g., for being unable to identify with her suffering and encourage her), and *with God* (for seeming slow to heal her). This conversation may stir difficult emotions and memories in some members. Invite them to share, as they will, their own struggles with being patient in the midst of suffering and grief.

### Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# The Education of Attention

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 3 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To examine Simone Weil's view that school studies, done in the right way, can foster the kind of patient attention that is essential to prayer.
2. To review members' daily activities to see whether they encourage habits of restless distraction or foster habits of attention required for prayer.
3. To consider how participating in the Lord's Supper and other worship practices can nurture patient attention.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Attentive Patience (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Story

"Apparently my nine year-old son, Jackson, is a mystic-in-the-making," Brad Hadaway reports. He recalls a walk they took on a path beside the River Thames as it leaves Oxford, England. "After a half hour of quiet, he turned to me and said that taking a long walk into the woods is 'like opening the envelope of your soul—an envelope that is usually sealed up tight.' To explain further, he said, 'It gives you a chance to concentrate...' and then he stopped himself and said, 'No, that's not quite right. In fact, it's exactly the opposite. When you're out here, you're not really concentrating even though your mind is working. It's like you are aware of important things without even having to try. Your envelope is opening.'"

"My first thought in response was, 'This, and yet you can't remember to put your dirty clothes in the laundry basket.' My second thought was, 'I need to get little Thoreau here a journal, a quill, an inkwell, and a little cabin by a pond just to see what else he might come up with.' His out-of-the-blue metaphor has stuck with me ever since our walk. In it, I hear the nine-year-old stirrings of something like contemplative prayer—the kind of prayer that occurs when we empty the self (open our envelope) and turn a patient, attentive gaze outward, finally prepared to receive the light of God which is *always* shining."

Noting that "the frenetic pace of life and our restless love of constant activity reshape us into people who genuinely struggle to practice the kind of slow, deliberate, self-emptying attention that would allow us to touch and know the Truth," Hadaway concludes: "We need more walks." (*Attentive Patience*, pp. 28-29)

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to bless members' preparation and study with insight that draws them closer to one another and to God.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 5:15-16 from a modern translation.

### *Meditation*

Invite members to reflect on the meditation from Psalm 46:10a during a period of silence.

### *Reflection*

This study analyses the sort of patient attention that is required for gaining insight about ourselves, other persons, the world, and God. It expands on Simone Weil's views that we can develop habits of patient attention, and that these habits prepare our hearts for the form of prayer that is resting in God's presence and aligning our will with God's. The scripture passage reminds us that Jesus sometimes withdrew from the distraction of the crowds that followed him in order to attend to God in such prayer (cf. Luke 6:12; Luke 9:28; Matthew 26:36//Mark 14:32//Luke 22:41).

In certain practices of worship we nurture patient attention to one another and to God. As time permits, you can draw on the suggested articles to explore this point.

### *Study Questions*

1. Simone Weil says the easy receptivity or openness required for insight involves "suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object." It is an anticipation of and willingness to receive a gift. Invite members to share their experiences of insight – into their own character, desires, and actions; about a close personal relationship; or regarding the solution to a vexing problem – that fits Weil's description. She believes this receptivity must be second nature (that is, done without the effort of constant self-management, which easily could distract us from the object of study).
2. Brad Hadaway identifies three things Weil might have in mind as "negative effort" to prepare for insight: continually adopting the stance of open and receptive anticipation of insight; keeping relevant background knowledge in mind, but not allowing it to dictate our attention (like focusing on a vast mountain vista, while seeing many details); and clearing our hearts of prideful intentions to "master" the object, person, or relationship we study. Such efforts are "negative" because they do not lead to insight, but remove obstacles to it.
3. Both study and prayer require patient attention to the other and are oriented toward receiving the truth. Prayer is distinctive, on the one hand, because its object is the highest – the Truth, which is God – and thus it requires our utmost attention. However, if Weil stopped with this point, she would be saying that prayer is just the most demanding form of study. However, she insists that prayer is a relationship initiated by God, and its success depends on God seeking communion with us. Thus she writes, "Even if our efforts of attention seem for years to be producing no result, one day a light that is in exact proportion to them will flood the soul. Every effort adds a little gold to a treasure no power on earth can take away."
4. Form two small study groups to brainstorm those daily activities that encourage habits of distraction (television watching, Internet surfing, use of cell phones, window shopping, and so on) and those activities that nurture patient attention (preparing nutritious meals, reading to a child, and so on, along with the ones that Hadaway mentions). As each group reports its list, invite other members to add to or question items on the list.
5. Taylor Sandlin notes that communal meals require us to slow down, wait for other diners, and attend to their needs. He writes, "The practice of the Lord's Supper is anything but efficient. It does not seem to have the immediate effect of a clever sermon or emotion-stirring song. In a world that constantly boasts of faster, more efficient service, the Lord's Supper, when it is done well, remains excruciatingly slow." For this reason, "the [Lord's Supper] table serves as a practice run for the rest of life. If we cannot wait for each other there, we likely will not wait on or serve each other anywhere else."

Invite members to share how other worship practices can have this benefit. They might mention showing a child how to use a hymn book or prayer book, singing hymns or praying responsively, listening to prayer requests, sharing times of quiet meditation, and so on.

### *Departing Hymn*

"To Know That You Are God" is on pp. 55-57 of *Attentive Patience*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.